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ABSTRACT

J. Kenneth Benson's political economy model for interlibrary cooperation identifies linkages and describes interactions between the environment, the interlibrary organization, and member libraries. A tentative general model for interlibrary organizations based on the Benson model was developed, and the fit of this adjusted model to the realities of interlibrary organizations was tested by applying it to the Michigan Library Consortium (MLC) and the Midwest Regional Library Network (Midlnet). The principal strength of the model was identified as the use of the interlibrary organization as the unit of analysis. Two major weaknesses emerged: (1) it was found that the model did not fully develop the possibility that an interlibrary organization can become a relatively powerful broker in negotiations with the environment despite its lack of formal power and authority; and (2) further research is recommended to fully explore the impacts of work components in member libraries on the internal power structure of the system. (BBM)

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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INTERLIBRARY ORGANIZATIONS:
TWO CASE STUDIES

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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INTERLIBRARY ORGANIZATIONS

Charles Townley

INTRODUCTION

The interlibrary organization is a growing phenomenon in librarianship.¹ Over 250 interlibrary organizations exist among academic libraries alone.² Ninety percent of these have been established since 1965.³ The rate of growth of interlibrary organizations is pervasive throughout librarianship.⁴ As interlibrary organizations grow larger and more complex, the need to understand them as a distinctive organizational type increases. This article proposes a general model for interlibrary organizations based on organizational theory in the social and management sciences.

Library literature has recognized the importance of interlibrary organizations by producing a growing number of studies on the topic.⁵ Most authors present descriptive studies detailing the operations of one or more interlibrary organizations.⁶ A small, but growing, group of writers are linking this data to theory in efforts to explain phenomena within interlibrary organizations. Becker, Butler and Duggan apply network theory to explain the flow of tangible products within an interlibrary organization.⁷ Olson, Parker, Reynolds and Sloan explore behavioral attitudes implicit in interactions among libraries.⁸ Beasley, Brong, Kraus, Martin and Swartz investigate political and economic aspects of interlibrary organizations.⁹ All this research has led to important, but

partial, findings on the nature of interlibrary organizations. Research has thusfar been unable to integrate these findings in a general organizational model for interlibrary organizations.

Research on interorganizational relations within the social and management sciences is similar to studies on interlibrary organizations. Descriptive research has collected much basic data on the scope of interorganizational relations. Litwak and Hylton, Levine and White and Pfeffer investigate various modes of cooperation, including exchange, coordination and merger.¹⁰ Others, such as Paulson and Warren, focus their analysis on the impacts of cooperation within member organizations.¹¹

Most library and organizational research exhibits three deficiencies: (1) it is partial and incomplete; (2) it is conceptually inconsistent; and (3) it fails to focus on the interlibrary organization as the unit of analysis. Levine and White's concept of exchange is an excellent example of an incomplete model. It is compatible with single action processes such as interlibrary loan. It is incapable of explaining continuing relationships such as a jointly owned bindery.¹² Secondly, the exchange model is conceptually inconsistent with Litwak and Hylton's coordination model.¹³ This leads one to suspect that both are perhaps based on dependent variables. Finally, many authors focus their analyses on the member organizations

rather than the interlibrary organization. In so doing, they fail to consider linkages with the environment.

Organizational research has recently undertaken the development of a general model for interorganizational relations.¹⁴ Although the model is incomplete, a basic framework now exists and can be modified for use with interlibrary organizations. This article will use Benson's presentation of this model to construct a tentative general model for interlibrary organizations. The fit of this model to the realities of interlibrary organizations will be estimated in narrative case studies of two interlibrary organizations. Strengths and weaknesses of the model will be addressed in the discussion.

BENSON'S POLITICAL ECONOMY MODEL

Benson's political economy model uses the interlibrary organization as the unit of analysis.¹⁵ The model identifies linkages and describes interactions between the environment, the interlibrary organization and member libraries. The political economy model has two components: (1) a necessary component, called the political economy, composed of all linkages used to acquire resources; and (2) a dependent component, called the superstructure of sentiment, composed of attitudinal linkages among member libraries and the interlibrary organization. The fundamental argument is that attitudes among libraries are dependent on the acquisition of resources.¹⁶ The emphasis on linkages used to acquire

resources is general in the social and management sciences.¹⁷ The primacy of resource linkages is becoming known in librarianship.¹⁸ Benson's contribution is applying the concept to interorganizational analysis in a framework that also allows the inclusion of existing research on attitudinal linkages.

Two resources are central to the political economy - money and authority. Authority is the responsibility for an activity or service to a specific population. If legitimately held, authority is a domain. Money and authority are inter-related in that the "authority to conduct activities is generally assumed to imply a claim upon money."¹⁹ In interactions with the environment, organizations will attempt to obtain the following political and economic results:

- fulfillment of existing program requirements.
- maintenance of authority.
- maintenance of orderly resources flow.
- the defence and extension of organizational boundaries.

If no organization in the interlibrary organization or the environment possesses coercive power, the political economy is blocked. Blockage does not imply the inability to act. It does mean that decisions will be negotiated on the basis of consensus and cooperation.²⁰

The superstructure of sentiment consists of attitudinal linkages among member libraries and the interlibrary organization. The political economy model grants significance

to the superstructure of sentiment, but recognizes its "dependence on underlying political and economic forces."²¹ Benson suggests four major dimensions in the superstructure of sentiment:

- domain consensus - agreement among the principals on the appropriate authority of each.
- ideological consensus - agreement among the principals on the nature of each other's work components.
- positive evaluation - regard for the quality of work produced by other principals.
- work coordination - patterns of collaboration among the principals.

Benson states that the superstructure of sentiment is normally in balance or equilibrium.²² (Figure 1)

AN ELABORATION FOR INTERLIBRARY ORGANIZATIONS

As a general model Benson's political economy requires elaboration to accurately reflect any specific organizational situation. In the case of interlibrary organizations, four major elaborations are required: (1) allowance for a two way flow of resources; (2) the impact of work components within the interlibrary organization on the political economy; (3) a description of the environmental structure; and (4) an outline of change strategies.

The political economy of interlibrary organizations is based on a two way flow of resources. This unique linkage pattern is due to an environment that contains two distinct hemispheres. (Figure 2) One of these hemispheres consists of member libraries and their parent organizations. Resources from this hemisphere flow into the interlibrary

FIGURE 1 EQUILIBRIUM MODEL

Types of Systems	Levels of:			
	Domain Consensus	Ideological Consensus	Interorganizational Evaluation	Work Coordination
Part A - Balanced Systems				
High Equilibrium	High	High	High	High
Moderate Equilibrium	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Low Equilibrium	Low	Low	Low	Low
Part B - Imbalanced Systems				
Forced Coordination	Low	Low	Low	High
Consensual Inefficiency	High	High	High	Low
Evaluative Imbalance	High	High	Low	High

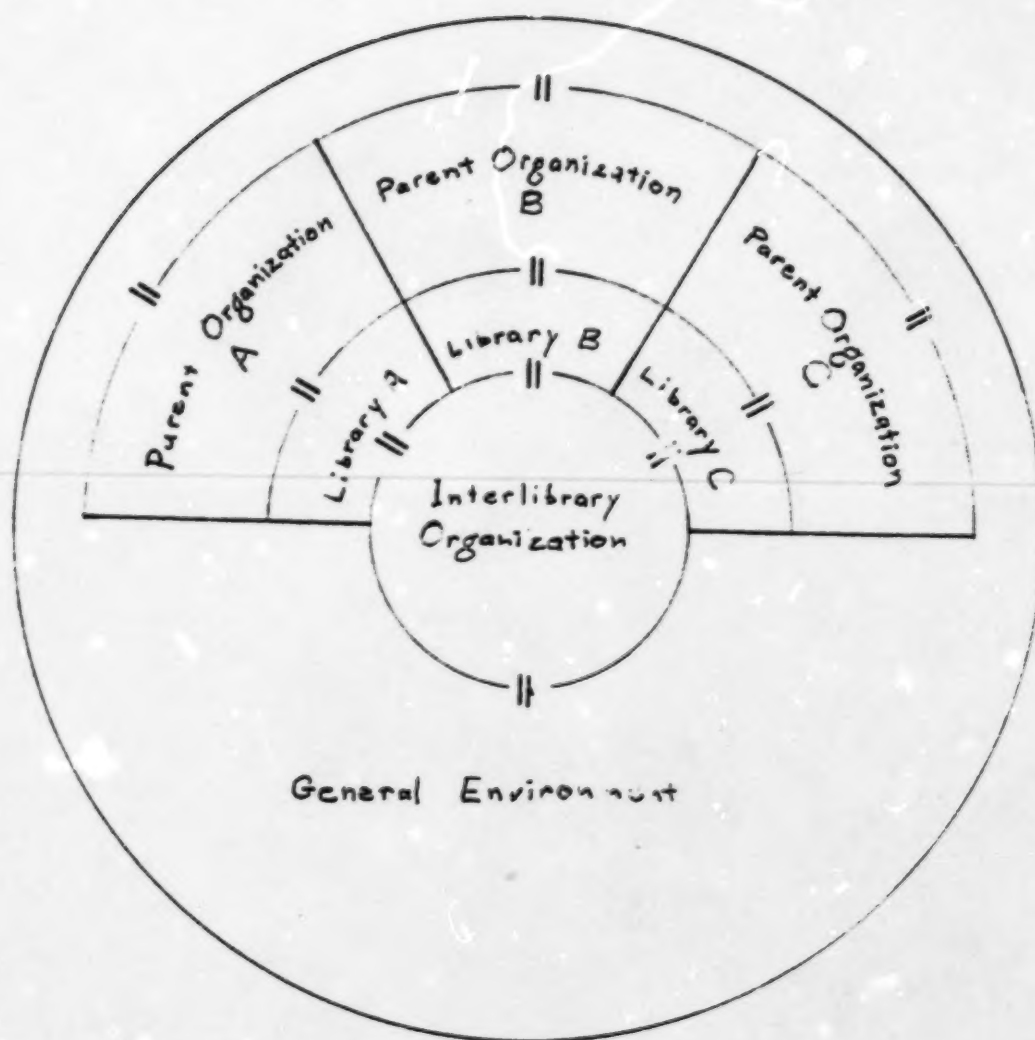


Figure 2
The Political Economy of Interlibrary Organizations

organization through formal and continuing linkages. Interactions to maintain and increase resources flow are usually justified on the basis of economy of scale and shared development costs for highly technological innovation.²³

The second hemisphere or general environment consists of organizations in the social and educational services, such as government and foundations. Resources from this environment flow into the interlibrary organization through direct, but often temporary linkages. Some of these resources may be passed to member libraries. Interactions to maintain and increase the flow of resources in the general environment are usually justified on the basis of maintenance of effort, research and demonstration of innovation. The two way flow of resources, if successfully managed, results in an improved capacity on the part of member libraries to meet their service obligations to parent organizations.

Most interlibrary organizations possess work components which produce one or more tangible products and services for member libraries. Examples include; joint operation of a bindery, bibliographic services, and data base brokerage, among many others.²⁴ Organizationally these services cover the spectrum of cooperative modes. Some are exchanges. Others are coordination, joint ventures or contractual. The existence of work components within interlibrary

organizations has impacts both in the political economy and the superstructure of sentiment. Within the political economy the existence of work components verify the two way flow of resources. Their presence justifies the flow of resources from member libraries and often attracts resources from the general environment. The existence of work components impacts on authority. Interlibrary organizations generate authority and create domains for work components. In defending and expanding these domains, the interlibrary organization also develops a degree of power when it interacts with its member libraries and the general environment. Whether the authority and domain are synergistic or are a partial absorption of the domains of member libraries is unclear. This is a matter for further research. Within the superstructure of sentiment, the existence of work components implies a high degree of equilibrium.

The environment of interlibrary organizations is structured. Some of the dimensions of structure include:²⁵

- resource concentration/dispersion. The resources of interlibrary organizations are dispersed. The two way flow of resources is the primary example of this phenomenon.
- power concentration/dispersion. Power is dispersed in interlibrary organizations. To the extent that interlibrary organizations are filling an environmental void, they may be synergistic in relation to power. The existence of an interlibrary organization enhances a member library's power in interactions with its parent organization. The interlibrary organization also serves to focus the power of libraries in their interactions with the general environment.
- network autonomy/dependence. Interlibrary organizations are largely autonomous. Most are non-profit educational corporations established under provisions of Section

501(c)(111) of the Internal Revenue Code.

- resource abundance/scarcity. The prime motivation for the development of interlibrary organizations is the chronic scarcity of resources in individual libraries. Interlibrary organizations are established to achieve economy of scale, share costs and attract resources from the environment.

- control mechanisms. At the present time there are few controls on interlibrary organizations. Some states, such as Illinois, have a permissive law for one statewide interlibrary organization.²⁶ Some interlibrary organizations operating in more than one state face restrictions on the use of state and local funds.²⁷

Interlibrary organizations are subject to change from a variety of sources. To a limited degree behavioral interventions may be used to change attitudes in the superstructure of sentiment. The success of this technique is limited by the political economy.

Change in the political economy occurs due to changes in political-economic linkages and fluctuations in the flow of resources. Examples might include: availability of foundation funds, retrenchment, new legislation or the development of a new technology. Benson suggests six strategies to manage change: (1) cooperative strategies; (2) disruptive strategies; (3) manipulative strategies; (4) authoritative strategies; (5) sequential strategies; and (6) combined strategies.²⁸ Due to the nature of blocked political economies, the following cases will emphasize cooperative strategies.

TWO CASES

Michigan Library Consortium²⁹

The Michigan Library Consortium (MLC) is a statewide interlibrary organization formed in 1974 and containing 69 member libraries. Legally, MLC is a non-profit educational corporation as defined in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The articles of incorporation give MLC the authority to receive and expend funds, sign contracts and administer work components. The organizational boundary of MLC is low. Any not for profit library organization in the state of Michigan may apply for membership. On approval of the Membership Committee and the payment of a \$50.00 annual fee, the library becomes a member. Each member appoints a librarian and lay person to the Board of Trustees. The Board meets annually for elections and approval of policy. Special meetings may be called to consider membership applications, personnel actions and committee appointments. The Executive Council is composed of the Director, elected officers, representatives from Detroit Public Library, Michigan State Library, Michigan State University Library, University of Michigan Library, and Wayne State University Library and six at-large members elected by the Board of Trustees. The Executive Council is the most powerful unit of MLC and has the power to make policy in the absence of the Board of Trustees, make proposals and implement programs. The Executive Committee also serves as

a search committee for personnel. The Executive Committee is chaired by the Director who is also responsible for day to day operations.

MLC has four major goals: (1) facilitating the sharing of resources among Michigan libraries; (2) enhancing the availability of information resources to the citizens of Michigan; (3) encouraging cost effectiveness possible through statewide cooperation; and (4) providing link-ups with on-line bibliographic data bases. In 1976, the Program Development Committee made a series of thirteen recommendations on the role of MLC. It recommended the creation of a full-time consortium office to undertake program development. It recommended a matrix of work components, some self-sustaining from member payments for service and some funded by the general environment. It recommended that some work components be open to all libraries and others only to members.

MLC's major work component is serving as the Michigan network node for the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC) online bibliographic data base. MLC is also the recipient of a Kellogg Foundation grant for OCLC start-up and training. MLC is in negotiation with the state for resources required to provide open access for all library users in the state, strengthen Interloan and provide for the development of state data bases.

Economically, MLC is based on a two way flow of resources. Member libraries pay an annual fee and are charged on a

cost recovery basis for the use of most work components. Resources from the general environment, state funds or the Kellogg grants for example, either pass through MLC to member libraries or are given to work components within MLC which produce a tangible product for member libraries.

Some questions do exist in the area of authority. Member libraries surrender no authority when they join MLC. Member libraries do voluntarily contract with MLC for services. In some cases these contracts establish joint ventures. In other cases they resemble a brokerage. MLC is clearly authorized to generate authority for itself. It is too early to forecast the final disposition of authority within MLC. For the present, it is clearly a blocked political economy.

MLC is carefully designed to achieve high equilibrium in the superstructure of sentiment. Member libraries have approved the report of the Program Development Committee which identifies the domains of MLC. The organization recognizes the powerful domains of the four largest libraries in the state by giving them permanent chairs on the Executive Council. It recognizes the State Library's domain in the general environment by placing it on the Executive Council. Ideological consensus is achieved in that libraries generally perform similar work for their parent organizations. At this stage of development it is impossible to estimate the final level of positive evaluation and work coordination. The outlook is promising

in that member libraries have worked closely in the past and use the same general standards. However, as interaction increases, one can reasonably expect some conflict. OCLC, for example, is having problems with the quality of bibliographic input. This has caused a drop in the level of positive evaluation among its member libraries. It should be possible for MLC to deal with these issues either by administrative rule or behavioral interventions.

Which changes will be of use to MLC in negotiating its environment? Most change will come about through cooperative strategies in which agreements, based on compromise, are reached following joint negotiations. The Kellogg grant encourages this strategy by maintaining existing resource relationships. While start-up and training funds go to MLC, operational funds go to individual libraries in the state. This gives member libraries the ability to negotiate with MLC, as well as other organizations, for services. It will be interesting to observe MLC's efforts to develop a breadth of work components adequate to attract most of the operational funds. If Benson's model is correct, the power of the major libraries in the Executive Committee will be the key in this process. Executive members will provide direction and encourage acceptability on the part of other libraries.

MLC is also developing a cooperative strategy designed to attract resources from the general environment,

particularly the state. Both MLC and the State Library want to implement reciprocal borrowing privileges for individual library users and improved interlibrary loan among libraries in the state. This will require state funding of a subsidy or fee for service payment to major libraries in the state willing to service users not a part of their parent organization. At the present time MLC possesses the authority to implement a work component in this area, but has no money. The state on the other hand is capable of supplying the money, but needs support to get the program funded. Successful negotiations will hinge on the development of an acceptable cooperative strategy where funds acquired by the state will flow through MLC.

The touchstone of MLC's authority is its monopoly as the network node for OCLC in Michigan. Many libraries in the state are committed to contracting for OCLC services. In order to participate member libraries are required to accept protocols for interaction and fee schedules established by the MLC membership. The possession of the OCLC network node also enhances the potential power of MLC in cooperative negotiations with the general environment and with member libraries. If the membership chooses, possession of the OCLC network node can be used to increase MLC's authority. The potential risks include loss of control to an overpowerful MLC or a takeover by environmental organizations. The potential benefits include an increased

flow of resources to member libraries. It is up to the membership to balance the risks and benefits to achieve maximum results for their individual libraries.

Midwest Region Library Network³⁰

The Midwest Region Library Network (Midlnet) is a regional interlibrary organization formed in 1975 under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Its articles of incorporation give Midlnet the authority to receive and expend funds, sign contracts and administer work components. Currently, Midlnet's fifteen member libraries are drawn from an eligibility pool consisting of state library agencies, statewide interlibrary organizations and research libraries eligible for membership in the Association of Research Libraries. In addition to meeting high membership criteria, each member library has contributed \$10,000. in membership fees. Midlnet is in the process of lowering these criteria to encourage a larger membership more representative of midwestern libraries. The Board of Directors consists of the library directors of member libraries. The Board of Directors elects the officers and Executive Committee. The Executive Committee makes policy and conducts business between Board meetings. An Executive Director is responsible for coordinating planning and operations.

Midlnet sees itself as a focal point for library development in the midwest. Midlnet has the following organizational objectives:

- reduce the per-unit cost of library operations and services.

- provide rapid and efficient access to and delivery of the library resources of the midwest to library users.
- coordinate and improve library planning, research and development in the midwest.
- provide a vehicle for the participation of the midwest in federal funding that will be available for regional network development and a voice for the midwest in the emerging national library network.
- protect the investment of the midwest in library resources through a coordinated materials preservation program.

Midlnet's program is not fully developed, but some work components are in place. Midlnet is serving as a broker for the establishment of OCLC network nodes in states like Iowa and Missouri where no suitable interlibrary organization exists. Midlnet is negotiating with BRS to become a regional broker for its data bases. Midlnet is undertaking a pilot project to test the capabilities of the University of Chicago online bibliographic data base. It is also considering the development of a regional serials system based on the Library of Congress CONSER system. Midlnet has designed and intends to test a computer conferencing system. Conferencing will be used to share regional expertise and facilitate interlibrary loan. Midlnet is considering a pilot interlibrary loan program among major libraries in the region. It is considering the possibility of a regional material conservation program. Midlnet has sponsored seminars on data management and the role of regional networks. As a member of the Library of Congress Network Advisory Committee, Midlnet is making input on current national library network planning.

Politically Midlnet is a complex and changing organization. Until recently it has represented the effort of elite libraries to control their environment through a joint venture.³¹ This will change as the membership becomes more diverse. Midlnet also represents an effort to establish a domain for very large scale work components controlled by libraries and not the environment. If this domain is successfully established, Midlnet will possess a significant amount of power in negotiations with private agencies, states and the Federal government.

Midlnet is designed to encourage the development of high equilibrium in its superstructure. Even with a more diverse membership, one may assume a high degree of domain and ideological consensus. A high degree of work coordination and positive evaluation should develop as work components are implemented.

Midlnet intends to become recognized as the regional interlibrary organization in the midwest. To establish this domain, Midlnet must successfully implement cooperative change strategies that will accomplish two objectives: (1) secure general acceptance from midwestern libraries; and (2) obtain resources from the general environment. Midlnet is moving to establish its general acceptance in midwest library community. State library agencies and statewide interlibrary organizations, who can generate Midlnet support among small libraries, have been included from the first. Midlnet is committed to an expanded membership. New criteria will enable moderately sized libraries

to become members. By granting these libraries membership eligibility, Midlnet stands to gain acceptance among the bulk of library leadership in the midwest. This, in turn, will support Midlnet's claim as the regional inter-library organization. The danger in this strategy is that by lowering membership criteria, Midlnet may begin to compete directly with state library agencies and statewide interlibrary organizations. Careful management and negotiation will be required to avoid counterproductive conflict.³²

To obtain a flow of resources from the general environment, Midlnet must establish cooperative linkages with organizations in the regional environment. At the present time few organizations in the environment are capable of interacting on a regional level. Federal government is only beginning to study the form of a national library network. Many state governments have not adopted the interstate library compact or are constitutionally prohibited from transferring funds outside the state. Until continuing linkages are established, Midlnet is forced to rely on temporary linkages with government agencies and foundations for specific work components to supplement member contributions. If Midlnet is able to maintain itself until a regional environment is in place, it will occupy a strong position during cooperative negotiations for continuing support.

DISCUSSION

Benson's political economy model offers a number of strengths in the analysis of interlibrary organizations. The principal strength is that the interlibrary organization is the unit of analysis. The analysis focuses on the linkages among the interlibrary organization, member libraries and both hemispheres of the environment. The political economy traces the interactions of differentially powerful organizations in the pursuit of scarce resources - money and authority. Power is exercised in the linkages among organizations. Environmental forces, for example resource concentration/dispersion, exist and have important impacts on the interlibrary organization and its member libraries. The process of cooperative negotiation is identified and described. The superstructure of sentiment is defined as dependent on the political economy.

Benson's model has two major weaknesses when applied to interlibrary organizations. The interlibrary organization is given little power or authority. The two interlibrary organizations studied give strong evidence that they have been formed, in part, to serve as a focal point for power in negotiations with the general environment. The presence of work components in interlibrary organizations is used by member libraries as a cost effectiveness strategy in negotiations with parent organizations. MLC now has enough power to informally negotiate with the state rather than simply submit to directives. Midlnet is attempting

to establish a domain before the general environment is prepared to deal with it. In this way Midlnet feels that it can generate sufficient power to significantly influence events in the future. Given the dispersed nature of two way resources flow in libraries, an interlibrary organization can become a relatively powerful broker in negotiations with the environment. This possibility is not fully developed in Benson's model.

The other problem with the Benson model is its assumption that products and services are provided solely by member libraries. Most interlibrary organizations have one or more work components delivering a product or service to member libraries or their users. The presence of these work components leads to the generation of authority, domains and power within the interlibrary organization itself. This power can be used by member libraries to influence interactions in both the political economy and the superstructure of sentiment. While the elaboration of the political economy presented here allows for the existence of work components, it does not fully measure their impacts. Further research is required to fully explore the implications of work components within interlibrary organizations.

FOOTNOTES

¹Definitions for terms are provided in the Glossary following the footnotes. Comments by Frederick H. Wagnan and the staff of the University of Michigan Library are gratefully acknowledged.

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GLOSSARY

attitudes - the collective opinions of decision-makers within an organization. Attitudes facilitate or inhibit the interactions of organizations and their environments.

authority - the responsibility for an activity or service to a specific population.

blockage - cases in the political economy where a number of minimally powerful organizations confront each other on terms approximating equality.

boundary - the extent of one organization's authority. Boundaries between organizations or between an organization and its environment may be spanned with linkages.

environment - the aggregate of political, economic and social conditions that influence the decision-making process of an organization. For the purposes of this article, the most important components of the environment are the supply of resources and the distribution of power.

equilibrium - cases in the superstructure of sentiment where the interactions of member libraries are based on normative consensus and mutual respect.

interactions - actions between two or more organizations using linkages between organizational boundaries.

interlibrary organization - a voluntary work organization composed of two or more separately governed library organizations. An interlibrary organization provides services, facilitates communication and fosters cooperative activities. Most, but not all networks, systems and consortia are interlibrary organizations.

linkages - connecting structures or channels between organizational boundaries. Linkages are usually established on the basis of a protocol, agreement or contract among the principals concerned.

member libraries - a term used to identify libraries which are members of an interlibrary organization.

political economy - those activities undertaken by organizations in pursuit of an adequate supply of organizational resources.

power - possession of authority or influence over the actions of other organizations.

resources - for the purposes of this article, resources consist of money and authority.

superstructure of sentiment - those activities undertaken by organizations in pursuit of attitudinal objectives.

work component - an activity producing a tangible product or service.